

Aerial Photographs, Medmenham, and Archaeology

Aerial photography has over many years delivered a completely new perspective on our understanding of the past, revealing astonishing landscapes beneath apparently uninteresting fields and enabling us to make sense of incoherent lumps and bumps that are still visible. A recent well-illustrated book by Martin Barber* of the Aerial Survey and Investigation Department of English Heritage (now a part of Historic England), traces in fascinating detail the gradual appreciation that aerial photographs were not only of military importance but had a wide application in other fields including archaeology. Over half of Barber's splendidly researched book deals with the history of the subject prior to the Second World War, charting in particular OGS Crawford's efforts to interest the archaeological community in the value of aerials.

Early in the war, RAF Station Medmenham was established as a base for the Central Interpretation Unit to deal with aerial photographs and to forward information gathered there to other locations including Bletchley Park. Among the staff recruited to Medmenham were a number of archaeologists who during their lifetimes made substantial contributions to our understanding of the past. They included Glyn Daniel, Stuart Piggott, Terence Powell, Dorothy Garrod, Charles Phillips, Grahame Clark, Leslie Grinsell and Brian Hope-Taylor. Although several of these individuals found time to pursue their own research subjects whilst at Medmenham, sadly they seem they seem not to have contributed anything to the archaeology of the county within which they were situated – despite the fact that Danesfield House, the core of the RAF station, itself lies within an Iron Age hillfort! Or do others know differently?

*Barber M 2011 *A History of Aerial Photography and Archaeology*. English Heritage.

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